AFRICA RECOVERY

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World Bank calls for better aid targeting

Major new study evaluates the effectiveness of aid

By **Jacqueline Irving**

Aid will work effectively only if it is targeted to countries with "sound" policies and institutions, the World Bank states in a major report published in November. According to *Assessing Aid — What Works, What Doesn't, and Why*, poverty reduction efforts would be more successful if donors directed their assistance to the right countries, for aid is "wasted" when it is disbursed to countries with "unsound" policies and institutions. "An across-the-board $10 bn increase in aid would lift seven million people out of poverty, while a targeted increase could lift 25 million out of poverty," the report claims.

At a time when development aid has hit the lowest level in its 50-year history, some have interpreted the report as a possible justification for aid cuts. But the Bank's Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz argues that "the report encourages donors to contribute more aid where it will have the most impact." By stirring debate, the report helps draw needed attention to acknowledged inefficiencies of aid distribution and the shrinking size of the overall aid "pie."

Between 1991 and 1997, the report notes, official development assistance (ODA) from the 21 biggest donors fell from an average of 0.33 per cent to just 0.22 per cent of their gross national product (GNP). Of all these members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), only four reached or exceeded the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNP last year. And for Africa, the world's most aid-dependent region, ODA from OECD countries fell to $15.4 bn in 1996 from $20.7 bn in 1992. (However, a few donors, including the UK and Sweden, recently announced plans to increase their aid to Africa in 1999.)

Assessing Aid's publication is well timed since it coincides with "rather acrimonious debate about the effectiveness of aid amidst donor fatigue," notes Mr. Kwesi Botchwey, former finance minister of Ghana and currently Director, Africa Research and Programmes of the Harvard Institute for International Development. He commended the report for its role in "structuring the debate and anchoring it against some general observations that are rooted in empirical study rather than just opinions and prejudices."

Indeed, the report frequently cites findings and evidence from multi-country research, World Bank-financed investment projects and aid effectiveness case studies. One of its findings is that "the simple relationship between aid and per capita growth in developing countries is weak, if it exists all." Some countries that have received plenty of aid have grown slowly (such as Zambia) while other countries also receiving substantial assistance have grown rapidly (such as Botswana). Adding to the complexity, there are even countries where significant aid disbursements have been followed by periods of slower or even negative economic growth.

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Experimental windmill for power and water in Kenya: the Bank says aid should change systems, not just sectors.

Education theme for UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 1999*

UNICEF / Sprague

The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was observed around the world on 10 December. UNICEF says that 130 million children in developing countries do not go to school, and a billion people, mostly women, cannot read or write — "a violation of rights and a loss of potential and productivity the world can no longer tolerate."

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Making right to education a reality

UNICEF calls for stronger action in Africa and other developing regions

Sub-Saharan Africa needs to spend an extra $1.9 bn a year in order to attain universal primary enrolment by 2010, says the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). The region spends $9 bn a year on education, but this is only half the 1980 level of per capita spending and over 40 million children are not in school, UNICEF observes in *The State of the World's Children, 1999*. Meanwhile, it adds, the region's debt service payments exceeded $12 bn in 1996.

Although quality education is widely seen as a basic human right that also promotes economic development, gaining access to it remains a struggle for many children in Africa and other parts of the developing world. UNICEF points out that discrimination against girls is the largest impediment to achieving universal primary education. Launching the report in London on 8 December, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy noted the "devastating, and even life-threatening consequences" of inadequate access to education, particularly for girls and women, and called for more decisive action.

African countries were among the 155 nations that committed themselves, at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, to ensuring greater access to improved schooling for girls and women. The conference recognized that more and better schooling for girls and women generates many social benefits such as lower mortality and morbidity rates for infants, children and women, as well as higher levels of nutrition and educational attainment. But after making some progress, sub-Saharan Africa's net primary school enrolment for girls is currently lower, at 51 per cent, than in 1985, UNICEF says.

Through its global Girls' Education Programme, UNICEF is supporting efforts to reduce gender disparities in educational access in the three regions with the widest gaps — sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. UNICEF is also backing an African Girls' Education Initiative in over 20 countries that aims to help increase girls' enrolment, improve educational systems and increase the relevance and gender sensitivity of the curriculum.

In a related effort to provide schooling at sustainable levels of quality and gender balance within 10-15 years, the Forum of African Women Educators (FAWE) has worked on a programme of Strategic Resource Planning (SRP) with the UK's Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University. The programme took off in Ethiopia, Guinea and Tanzania in 1995 and has since been taken up in Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia. The SRP helps education ministries to focus on specific problems facing girls, collect and analyze relevant data, and develop policy options for closing the gender gap and ensuring universal primary schooling. One novelty is the participation of local communities, teachers, policy-makers and donors in discussing SRP research findings.

The SRP is a key part of FAWE's work on gender and primary schooling in Africa, which has seen some countries moving towards implementation of major proposals. In Ethiopia, this could involve automatic promotion in the first five grades, and double shifts for three-quarters of primary and secondary students. Through such measures, Ethiopia could raise gross primary enrolment rates of 39 per cent for boys and 24 per cent for girls to 102 and 106 per cent respectively within 15 years. In another example, Guinea has identified early marriage as the main reason for low completion rates for girls, and the government has now made it illegal to force a girl into marriage before the ninth grade.

There is much to do to turn the right to education into a global reality, but the effort is the "soundest investment in a peaceful and prosperous future that we can make for our children," UNICEF concludes. ■

Primary school enrolment, 1990-96 (gross*, %)

	Sub-Saharan Africa	All developing countries
male	82	105
female	47	93

Secondary school enrolment, 1990-96 (gross*, %)

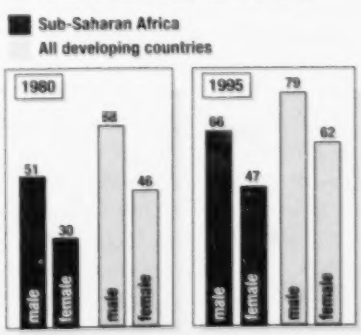
	Sub-Saharan Africa	All developing countries
male	28	54
female	23	45

* *The gross enrolment ratio is the number of children enrolled in a school level, regardless of age, as a percentage of the total number of children in the age group which officially corresponds to that level.*

Source: UNICEF, State of the World's Children 1999

UNICEF / Giacomo Pirozzi

Adult literacy rates (%)



Source: UNICEF, State of the World's Children 1999

Nigeria unveils new privatization plan

The IMF is pleased, but critics worry about job losses and social inequities

By **Tunde Obadina**

Nigeria's government is kicking off a privatization programme that promises to be one of the biggest in Africa and to help mend the country's strained relations with international financial institutions. In early October the Bureau of Public Enterprises, a state agency, invited local and international investors to flag their interest in more than two dozen state-owned companies slated for privatization. Companies up for sale range from giant state telecommunications and power utilities to cement, sugar and vehicle plants, as part of what the government says is a comprehensive programme of privatization and commercialization of public enterprises. Government officials say the aim is to turn around poorly managed and cash-strapped state enterprises whose inefficiencies have hampered economic development in Africa's most populous nation.

General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who came to power in June following the death of his predecessor, General Sani Abacha, aims to get the privatization programme on track before restoring civilian democratic rule, now scheduled for May 29, 1999. His commitment to market-oriented reform has won him praise from Western creditors and international financial institutions.

Resumption of a serious privatization effort has been one of the pre-conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for negotiating an interim programme monitored by Fund staff that would open the way for talks on a medium-term economic strategy agreement for Nigeria. Nigeria also needs an accord with the IMF and the World Bank to pave the way for debt relief talks with the Paris Club. Its members account for 70 per cent of the country's total foreign debt of roughly $31 bn (in 1996). During a visit to Nigeria in mid-September by World Bank Vice-President for Africa Jean-Louis Sarbib, Bank officials told reporters they were encouraged by the reforms introduced by General Abubakar, including privatization.

Seeking 'strategic investors'

Under the new programme, the government plans to sell 40 per cent of its equity in the enterprises to "strategic investors" — usually understood to mean foreign companies — which also will gain management control of the concerns. The shares will be sold through international open tenders to investors with proven technical and financial capabilities. Another 20 per cent will go to Nigerian investors through public share offers, leaving the government with a 40 per cent stake.

The biggest companies to go on the auction block are the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL), respectively Nigeria's second and third largest public corporations, after the giant Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). NEPA is to be broken up and sold off in separate units comprising eight generating companies, 15 distribution and sales companies and the national grid company. Also on offer are

Source: UN Africa Recovery from World Bank, Privatization in Africa, 1998.

the National Fertilizer Company, two hotels, three steel rolling mills, three paper companies, six vehicle assembly firms, a cement company and a sugar plant. Although not included among the companies mentioned in the advertisements inviting inquiries, the government has said it also plans to privatize the country's four oil refineries owned by the NNPC; their dismal performance has caused perennial fuel shortages in this oil-producing country.

By handing over management control of public enterprises to strategic investors, the government hopes to repeat the success of its partnership with oil multinationals, which hold minority stakes in joint ventures that produce more than 95 per cent of Nigeria's crude oil output.

Besides enhancing efficiency, privatization is seen as a way of increasing foreign investment and drawing Nigeria more fully into the global economy. "This administration ... invites the international community and Nigerians to come and participate in our privatization programme," General Abubakar told a news conference in early September. "We also invite international investment banks, commercial banks, export credit agencies and management consultants to work with us in our liberalization of markets, deregulation and privatization."

A controversial measure

Not all Nigerians are convinced of the wisdom of selling off state assets or giving foreigners control of crucial utilities. "The federal government is headed on a [path] of unprecedented national calamity with the foreign ownership of any part of NEPA, NITEL, the refineries or the railways," wrote commentator Ken Ogbuagu in the Lagos-based *Guardian* newspaper in late October. "There is an international conspiracy whose aim is to grab the central nervous system of Nigeria, hence Africa. The sale of strategic national assets is absolutely wrong." Many people share the writer's concern that control of important public utilities by private companies — whose prime objective is profit-making — will halt the spread of development to poor sectors of society, particularly in the rural areas.

Privatization has been one of the most controversial aspects of economic liberalization that Nigeria's military rulers have wrestled with since embarking on free-market reforms in 1986. From one side, the government has been under immense pressure from local private sector groups and foreign creditor institutions to offload inefficient, under-funded and corruption-ridden state enterprises. According to official figures, federal government investment in public enterprises was about 100 bn naira ($4.6 bn) in 1996, with an average rate of return of only about 2 per cent.

From the other side, trade unionists and nationalist politicians have opposed the sale of government equity holdings, and pointed out the potentially negative social consequences of privatization, including job losses and increased charges for essential services. Sections of the ruling elite that rely on state enterprises for patronage also oppose the sell-offs. At the same time, there have been worries that privatization could lead to concentrated ownership of former state enterprises in the hands of members of certain ethnic groups, in a country where his-

torically ethnicity has been extremely sensitive.

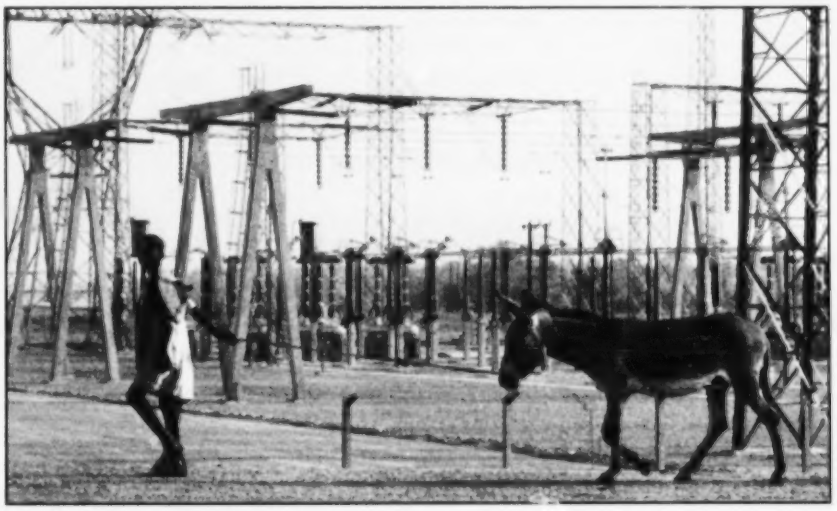
Faced with strong pressure from both advocates and opponents of privatization, Nigerian government policy on reforming ailing public corporations has been marked by uncertainty and hesitation in recent years. The last administration of General Abacha made several promises to privatize, but never acted.

Balancing equity holdings

In approaching privatization carefully, government officials have been mindful of the difficulties in striking the right equilibrium with a population that is sensitive about ethnic balance in access to national resources. Last May, Mr. Tom Ikimi, then Nigeria's foreign minister, said that the government was deliberately taking its time in privatizing state assets to ensure the benefits were fairly shared. "One of the fundamental problems of Nigeria is the distribution of wealth," he told the Reuters news agency. "This is what has consistently caused instability in Nigeria, and in order to ensure that this does not occur again, these things have to be taken very carefully and worked out very well," he said.

Nigeria had already carried out one successful privatization programme, which to a large degree accommodated the various concerns of different interest groups. Under a scheme launched by then President Ibrahim Babangida in 1988 as part of an IMF-backed structural adjustment programme, 73 enterprises were privatized by the end of 1992. Various methods were used to privatize the enterprises, mainly small and medium-scale concerns in agro-processing, cement, petroleum marketing, insurance and banking. Thirty-five were sold through public share offers, using a scheme that sought to ensure the equitable spread of ownership among different social classes and ethnic and regional groupings. An elaborate formula restricted the amount of equity that any individual or region could purchase and allocated a proportion of shares to all states of the federation as well as to employees. By allocating the bulk of the shares to people and institutions purchasing between 100 and 5,000 shares, the government encouraged small investors to participate in the scheme.

As a result, the exercise created well over half a million new shareholders in Nigeria, more than doubling the number of equity holders in an underdeveloped capital market. For instance, some 250,000 new shareholders bought shares in 12 privatized banks, the most prized category of enterprises sold. In terms of increasing the spread and penetration of share ownership in Nigeria, the Babangida programme was undoubtedly successful. Mr. Hamza Zayyad, the head of the Bureau of Public Enterprises, could claim with justification that the privatization programme revolutionized the Nigerian capital market. "There is no local government in Nigeria today where there are no shareholders," he said in 1994. His agency also helped establish the Shareholders Association, whose aims include educating shareholders on their rights and obligations, as well as promoting their interest in the activities of their companies. The association, organized into seven zones, has played an important role in developing a culture of shareholding in the country.



The electricity authority, Nigeria's second largest company, is among the state enterprises up for sale.

The divestment exercise occurred without much resistance from traditional opponents of market reforms, largely because the outcome did not confirm fears of major job losses or the concentration of wealth in certain regions of this multi-ethnic society. It also did not result in the transfer of majority ownership of national assets to foreigners, since the sales occurred before 1995, when the government scrapped laws that restricted the amount of equity foreigners could hold in companies in Nigeria.

Shift to the big enterprises

However, it was one thing for the government to sell its stake in small enterprises, in many of which it was only a minority shareholder. It is another matter to relinquish ownership and control of major fully state-owned national corporations. Over 1988-92, a total of some N3.4 bn ($155 mn) was earned from the sale of N468.2 mn ($21.3 mn) worth of original government equity. This is less than the state's holding in either NEPA or NITEL. None of the companies privatized by the Babangida regime symbolized the Nigerian state in the way that these large state-operated utility companies do.

Lacking a consensus on the extension of the privatization programme to the large state corporations, the government in 1993 suspended the scheme (after another eight enterprises were privatized in the early part of the year). In 1995, it announced a policy of leasing major state enterprises to private sector organizations, but the proposal was criticized by foreign creditor institutions as a poor substitute for privatization and never implemented.

Now, seeking to mend relations with the IMF and World Bank, the government is taking on a major new initiative, one that is likely to raise many of the long-standing controversies surrounding privatization in Nigeria. The response of foreign investors also remains to be seen. Analysts do not expect the country to be inundated with applications to buy up 40 per cent equity stakes in the companies slated for privatization. Outside of the oil sector, foreign investors have shown limited interest in Nigeria, a country tarnished by a reputation for corruption, inefficiency, decaying infrastructure and a generally difficult business environment. Besides assuring Nigerians of the wisdom of the privatization programme, the government also will have to convince investors that Nigeria is a sound bet. ■

Internet opens new markets for Africa

Many practical benefits for business, farming, health and education

By **Mike Jensen**

In Niger, Tuareg craftspeople are using the "virtual market" of the Internet to sell their products worldwide. Their crafts appear alongside many other African cultural products in a "cybermall" hosted by a Canadian charity which helps developing countries promote exports and trade. Across the continent, in Tanzania, Sangare Clearing and Forwarding, a small African shipping company that serves as agents for FedEx and Airborne Express, has eliminated one of its biggest expenses by using e-mail to send through waybill numbers and delivery times, instead of going through three or four rolls of triplicate telex paper.

As in most other developing regions, the Internet in Africa has held special attraction for those engaged in trade and trade promotion. The potentially low cost of access to the Internet and its rapidly growing penetration (especially in the developed countries, which have the largest markets) offers new opportunities for poorly financed suppliers to reach buyers at any distance. As many potential products do not have well-established distribution channels, new relationships between buyers and sellers are being built through the Internet.

The Internet has spread rapidly through Africa over the last two years — at the end of 1996 only 16 countries had access, now over three-quarters of the 53 capital cities are online and soon almost all of the remaining ones will have full Internet facilities. Only Eritrea and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) are likely to be still "off the net" by the end of the year.

The Internet, which has spread rapidly through Africa, holds special attraction for those who engage in trade and trade promotion.

Access still limited

However, Internet services in the main cities cannot provide access to the 70 per cent of Africans who live in rural areas. A few countries do have access points in the second major city, but for most people it is still a prohibitively expensive telephone call, even when a computer, phone line and the necessary skills are available. Since most of these are in seriously short supply, there currently are only about 100,000 Internet users in Africa (excluding South Africa). At about one Internet user for every 5,000 people, this is well below the world average of about one user for every 40 people — and far behind the average of one Internet user per every 3-6 people in most countries of North America and Europe.

African policymakers and their international partners are seeking to address these startlingly low figures through a number of national and regional projects through the African Information Society Initiative (see *Africa Recovery*, March 1998; a full listing of projects is available on the Web at http://www3.sn.apc.org/africa/projects.htm).

Given Africa's need for improvements in more basic necessities such as clean water, the current interest in bringing Internet connectivity to all corners of the continent may seem out of place. Moreover, the investment necessary for providing even basic telecommunication services in rural and outlying areas may not be justified on economic grounds, since many people have so little income.

However, recent developments in the information and communications revolution — including the convergence of the television, telephone and computer — promise to provide completely new ways to deliver basic broadcast and communication services at far less cost in the future. This may make it possible for Africa to bypass the massive capital investments in older communications systems that the developed countries had to make, enabling the continent to leapfrog some stages and move directly into the information age. Yet, many of these technologies are very new and African telecommunications monopolies are only now beginning to open up, so there are currently few large-scale demonstrations in Africa of the benefits achieved through widespread access to communication and information.

The Internet is being used to market African crafts and tourist attractions, among other things.

Ingenious uses

Despite these hindrances, there are numerous examples of the ingenious uses to which low-cost communications already are being put in Africa. Electronic mail in particular has been adopted by almost every agency with international communication needs, largely because of its drastically reduced costs: instead of a one minute international fax call costing up to $20

in some countries, a one page e-mail requires a local call of only a few seconds.

For African businesses, such a cheap and rapid means of communication can greatly improve efficiency (see box). Companies and individuals purchasing office supplies, for example, are now able to compare prices of local equipment with international markets and negotiate substantial discounts with local suppliers.

Several governments, as in the Seychelles, are actively promoting conservation and ecotourism through the Internet. Many small local organizations also benefit, such as the Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage Trust, which promotes sponsorship of its chimpanzee conservation programme and game reserve in Zambia via the Web.

Many government departments, especially ministries of health, now are beginning to use e-mail for their administrative functions. Access to the world's best specialists is now a possibility as well — a doctor in Kenya recently solved a life-threatening case of malaria with complications by using HealthNet Kenya's low-cost e-mail service to connect him to experts in the US who quickly developed a specialized drug treatment programme.

Farmers also are starting to realize the benefits of direct access to the latest produce market quotations to negotiate better local prices for their crops, and many are exploring new avenues for international trade. For example, assisted by the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in Nairobi, a rural Kenyan farming cooperative has established a relationship through e-mail with the US-based EarthMarketplace to sell local produce directly to North American consumers. Bypassing distributors reduces the costs, increases local farmers' revenues and improves the choice for consumers. Similarly, a British supermarket is planning to use e-mail to conduct "just in time" purchase of chili peppers from a farm in Kenya.

Independent newspapers and magazines now are published daily on the Web in a growing number of other African countries, allowing users in remote areas to obtain the latest news and independent analysis without waiting days or weeks for local postal deliveries.

Education online

The prospects for delivering educational support through the use of the Internet in schools, to extension and technical training programmes, and even to individuals are beginning to show exciting possibilities. A number of large companies already have been attracted by the potential for using scheduled multimedia broadcasts via satellite to begin establishing the necessary infrastructure over Africa.

More than 6,000 correspondence course students all over Africa now can obtain advice and reading materials from their tutors at the University of South Africa (UNISA) via e-mail and the Web. UNISA also has tens of thousands of students in South Africa who make use of the service, called Students OnLine. The service provides for electronic registration, downloading of study materials, and posting of exam results (over 40,000 students picked up results this way after the last exam period). In addition, every time an assignment is submitted, the student can follow it through the entire process of evaluation and review.

In a few instances, the use of the Internet is already reducing the isolation of some marginalized groups. In Ghana, the lack of an efficient postal service has provided a market for Message Link, a network of e-mail hubs which print out messages received and then deliver them to their addressees by bicycle. In Kenya, women are building an electronic network, including a database of contacts and an online discussion area (http://www.africaonline.co.ke/AfricaOnline/women.html).

At the moment, many such activities in Africa take place in areas close to capital cities, because their concentration of economic and communications facilities has stimulated sufficient demand to make them more viable to operate. However, if awareness of the best models for success can be increased in rural areas and the costs shared among the broad range of providers and users, the wide variety of services that now can be delivered through a single telecommunications link will offer new possibilities to provide for local populations' information and communication needs.

In particular, there is growing interest in kiosks, "cybercafes" and other forms of public access, such as adding personal computers to community phone-shops, schools, police stations and clinics which can share the cost of equipment access among a larger number of users. External institutions such as the International Telecommunication Union and Canada's International Development Research Centre, along with local organizations such as the South African Universal Service Agency, are supporting applications from communities for such "telecentres." ■

Gains in business efficiency from going online

Although much attention has been focused on how the Internet may generate new business opportunities, companies in Africa are finding it is having a far greater impact on how their existing business is done. Using the Internet is cutting the cost of doing business, speeding up the business cycle, eliminating middlemen and expanding the range of potential customers.

For example, Tanzania Regent Clearing and Forwarding (TRCF), a small import-export company, now uses $0.10 e-mail messages and $1 e-mail fax gateways instead of $20 international faxes and telexes to place orders for products in North America and Europe. As a result, the company has seen its telecommunications bill fall from $500 to $45 per month. Meanwhile, stationery costs for fax and telex paper have been eliminated, along with time-wasting, expensive and error-prone typing of documents.

With cheap and almost immediate access to many of its suppliers, TRCF now is able to place a series of orders each day as they come in, instead of having to wait to consolidate orders in one fax or telex. Likewise, the company's clients, if they also have e-mail, can place orders more cheaply, at any time, from virtually anywhere, even if they are out of the country. They also need not worry about mistakes in the orders caused by retyping or fax errors. Using information on the World Wide Web, TRCF also has become a more effective promoter of its own services, through its increased ability to analyze trade statistics, identify new markets and carry out Internet-based promotions.

Aside from the clear importance of access to electronic mail for cementing personal relationships with clients, the Internet is expected to generally increase business for service companies like TRCF by providing a powerful new vehicle for linking suppliers directly with the final consumers of their products. With the potential to substantially improve efficiency by eliminating intermediaries, the Internet's further expansion can bring reduced costs that can then be passed on to the customer.

— M.J.

Giving the Internet an African voice

Expanding African content is as important as widening access

By **Lishan Adam**

Although the number of African countries with direct links to the Internet has expanded rapidly in the past few years, connectivity remains beyond the realm of most Africans, many of whom are unable to access even basic communications technology. In response, African governments and international development agencies are emphasizing programmes to broaden access, so that many more users — from businesses to local communities — can harness the information available on the Internet. For example, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Africa Telecom '98 Conference, held 4-10 May 1998 in Johannesburg, called for improving cost-effective Internet access through such innovations as multipurpose community centres or kiosks.

Some local observers believe, however, that too much emphasis is being given to developing the technology and channels for dissemination, rather than the actual content. The common response to this concern is usually: "Don't worry about content. Give access to users and the content will follow."

A miniscule contribution

Despite such optimism, experience in Africa shows that access does not guarantee the production and availability of indigenous content. The tremendous potential for sharing knowledge on the Internet — where content is growing by 1.5 mn pages per day — is not being exploited. The information available on the Internet is dominated overwhelmingly by material produced in the US, Europe and Asia, with Africa generating only around 0.4 per cent of global content, according to a July 1998 survey conducted by Network Wizards, a California-based computer firm. And if South Africa is excluded, Africa generates a mere 0.02 per cent of global Internet content.

The picture is slowly but steadily improving, however. Nearly all African countries that are online have some form of locally or internationally hosted Web server, unofficially or officially representing the country with varying degrees of comprehensiveness. And although English-language content initially dominated African Internet content, a recent project of La Francophonie, supported by France and Quebec, has substantially increased the quantity of Web-based information available in French. The project provides Web servers and support to government ministries in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mauritania and Senegal. The Banque internationale d'information sur les Etats francophones also plans to establish Web servers in Benin, Tunisia, Mauritius and Morocco.

The tremendous potential for sharing knowledge on the Internet is not being exploited. Africa generates only 0.4 per cent of global Internet content.

Aside from the growing amount of information supplied by African governments and businesses, an increasing amount of Internet content is also being generated by African universities and their former students now living in Europe and North America. Most African universities now have at least basic e-mail connectivity, while universities in 13 countries have full Internet access. Nearly all African universities have some form of presence on the World Wide Web, hosted locally or elsewhere.

Varied quality, diverse content

Internet content that originates from Africa or relates to the continent varies in quality — ranging from sites such as that maintained by Africa Positive (http://www.africapositive.co.za/), which promotes positive attitudes towards the region, to articles and discussions dominated by personal experiences and perspectives. As Internet content covering a diverse range of topics grows in volume, it is becoming increasingly difficult to categorize by subject area. A large portion of the content can be broadly classified as business information, however.

Many large and small companies in Africa have discovered that the Internet can serve as a global marketing tool. Craftsmen in Uganda, Botswana and Senegal are now making their products available worldwide via electronic commerce, through the UN International Trade Centre's Virtual Handcraft Exhibition Centre. Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), another online marketing tool, is being used by large- and small-scale enterprises. According to Dr. Nii Quaynor, Director of National Computing Services (NCS), a leading Ghanaian service provider that runs the local EDI, NCS's experience holds considerable potential in West Africa.

There is no scarcity of news about Africa on the Internet. In addition to updates by mainstream media sources such as Cable News Network and the British Broadcasting Corporation, there is increasingly well-presented news from alternative sources such as InterPress Service and the Pan-African News Agency. In addition, newspapers from 33 countries are now available online, providing direct access to news about a particular country as told by its local media. At the click of a mouse, *La Tribune* of Algiers, *Actualités burkinabè* of Ouagadougou, *Les Echos* of Bamako or the *Zimbabwe Independent* of Harare can be accessed from anywhere on earth with an Internet connection.

The size of the Web, its rapid growth and constantly changing user needs render many popular Web sites quickly obsolete. Nevertheless, some sites manage to host substantive and regularly updated information on African social and economic development (see table).

More tourism sites

As is the case with all other content relating to Africa, information on travel and tourism is dominated by South Africa. However, an increasing amount of up-to-date travel and tourism information on other African countries is becoming available. For example, in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda, Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Egypt, The Gambia and Tunisia sites are maintained by government authorities, travel agents and enthusiasts, and various other local sources. One remote eco-tourism resort in South Africa is gaining a global clientele because its Website features multimedia displays of attractions and includes an online reservation system.

One notable gap is African scientific and technological information. The little that exists in this category is mainly devoted to information technology. Finding such content involves tremendous effort. Attempts to build consolidated directories, virtual libraries and gateways

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Some popular Web sites on social and economic development in Africa

Nature of site	Web address	Description
Directory	www.woyaa.com/index.html www.africaonline.com www.mbendi.co.za	Comprehensive directories of links to arts, news, business contacts, commercial information and information on education, travel, tourism and more. Best places to start searches on Africa.
Directory	www.africances.fr	A site dedicated to French-speaking Africa.
News	www.africanews.org/pana/news www.rapide-pana.com/index.htm	Sites for the Pan-African News Agency in English and French.
News	www.esperanto.se/kiosk/engindex.html	Link to online newspapers in Africa. A good site for reading local newspapers.
Electronic journals	www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/indiv/area/Africa www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/AS	Columbia University and University of Pennsylvania African studies sites for news and electronic journals.
Connectivity information	www3.wn.apc.org/africa	A good site on African connectivity and links relevant to policy, implementation, projects, views and international organizations and initiatives, such as the African Information Society Initiative.
Environment and development information	www.ids.ac.uk/eldis/eldis.html	Hosted by the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University, a good site for environment and development issues.
Online discussion on social and economic development	www.globalknowledge.org	Continuing discussion on issues of harnessing information technology for development; provides many links to interested organizations and individuals.
Field reports and books	www.idrc.ca www.idrc.ca/acacia	A good site consisting of documentation on rich field experiences of the International Development Research Centre, including its new "acacia" site on communities and information society in Africa.
NGOs	www.wn.apc.org www.oneworld.org	Sites that provide numerous links to non-governmental organizations in Africa and the world over.

on Africa-related science and technology information have not yet borne fruit.

Expanding access

Content development is a two-way process. While enriching the Web with Africa-related information is crucial to the promotion of indigenous content, access to global resources for those residing in Africa is equally important.

Yet the cost of Internet access is beyond the reach of most institutions and individuals. Monthly subscriptions to Internet services range from $10 to $250. Direct leased connections can cost as much as $15,000 a month.

The high cost is exacerbated by the lack of a policy environment that fosters competition, foreign direct investment and private sector participation. Fortunately, a number of institutions such as ITU, the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa, and the UN Development Programme are working together to improve the policy environment in Africa. Inadequate cooperation among local actors is another constraint. Although most countries have at least one Internet node with full external connectivity, intra-regional connectivity is not available, with the exception of Southern Africa, Egypt and Tunisia.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle is technical: the limited service bandwidth, which affects the ease and speed of access. Generally bandwidth is more scarce in Africa than in any other part of the world. It is not uncommon to get lines disconnected intermittently and wait long hours before getting connections. It can take half an hour to draw a Web page on a screen.

The private sector, eager to seize opportunities offered by electronic commerce, will increase its presence on the Web in the coming years. But the participation of public institutions and communities will remain marginal unless national, regional and international efforts are expanded. Such efforts should aim to democratize access, improve the infrastructure and create conditions for communities to participate in the development of Internet content. There already are pilot projects in many African countries to develop "telecentres," which seek to provide communication, education and healthcare information, generate income and facilitate the exchange of government documents.

There also should be greater national efforts to train users in Web site development, provide support for the creation and recognition of sites useful for development, promote local content-building service centres, find ways to address the multiplicity of languages used in Africa, and support and train "information brokers," such as librarians.

For the private sector to expand global linkages and accessibility — and thereby contribute to increases in African content — governments must create regulatory, legal and policy frameworks to protect security, privacy and copyright ownership, as well as to encourage competition at affordable prices.

Meanwhile, in the public sector, a substantial effort is needed to improve content creation or "publishing." While a wealth of information exists, it is largely inaccessible, disparate, and often unpublished. African content will not grow substantially without building the necessary human capacity, and must begin by taking into account the real needs of local users. ■

Zimbabwe presses land distribution

Donors react coolly to controversial plan, but black farmers urge even faster action

In Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and several other African countries, inequitable land distribution contributes to rural poverty and social and political tensions. In Southern Africa in particular, where it is a legacy of settler occupation, severe imbalances in land ownership also are a source of continued racial strain. In this special section (pages 10-15), Africa Recovery looks at the sometimes controversial efforts in Zimbabwe and Namibia to redistribute land to poor African farmers, while a UN economist argues that land redistribution can boost agricultural productivity.

By **Francis Mdlongwa**
Harare

Zimbabwe's government, buffeted by a deepening economic and social crisis, is being hurried by land-hungry small farmers to resolve a century-old problem of African landlessness, just as key aid donors have reacted coolly to its land redistribution programme. The plan aims to resettle tens of thousands of people on land originally seized from indigenous groups by British colonists, and thereby help redress economic imbalances between the country's blacks and whites.

But after vocal donor opposition when the plan was launched in September, the government, following many closed-door consultations, agreed to temporarily scale it back.

The government continues to insist, however, that the current distribution of land is both unjust and a source of political instability, pointing to the unauthorized occupations of white-owned land in recent months by groups of squatters.

The problem dates back to the 1890s, when British colonists settled in the country which was later to become Southern Rhodesia. The white supremacist policies of subsequent Rhodesian regimes worsened the problem of landlessness and fuelled the guerrilla war for independence. Despite the country's attainment of independence in 1980 as Zimbabwe, 6 million blacks still live on arid and infertile land not suitable for agriculture, while most of the farmland is controlled by 4,500 white commercial farmers, multinational companies and organizations such as churches.

Zimbabwe's land crisis, says President Robert Mugabe, "is rooted in our history as a colonized people. It is a question whose resolution is not negotiable." The government insists that the land distribution programme is vital for Zimbabwe's social and political stability, and notes that such stability is in the interests of the white commercial farmers themselves.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan agreed, in a speech read on his behalf at an early September land summit in Harare. "The equitable distribution of productive capital such as land is not only economically important but also essential to ensure peace and stability," he said. "In a country where women and children make up the majority of the rural poor, improving conditions in rural communities would go a long way towards creating a healthier and more educated society."

Donors withhold funding

As originally announced in September, the land redistribution programme envisaged resettling 150,000 families on 5 mn hectares of land within five years. But at the land summit in Harare, most donors pointedly refused to pledge any significant funding for the programme, which will cost an estimated Z$40 bn (US$1.9 bn). It was hoped that half the programme's total funding would be pledged by donors at the conference, but only a paltry Z$20 mn (US$180,000) actually was promised by Western nations and international aid agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The donors' concerns, as highlighted at the three-day summit, included:

- that the government will fail to pay full compensation for farms it is forcibly buying from large-scale farmers;
- that the programme is unlikely to address poverty in the poor "communal" areas, where the majority of Zimbabwe's population of 12 million lives;
- and that there are no adequate checks against corruption in the implementation of the programme.

The donors also said the programme is too ambitious and would require more than the projected five years for implementation. The main bone of contention centred on the government's controversial 1992 Land Acquisition Act, which empowers the state to forcibly buy farms and pay only what it considers to be fair compensation, a law fiercely resisted by Zimbabwe's commercial farmers, who produce most key exports.

US Ambassador to Zimbabwe Tom MacDonald summed up the mood of most donors at the conference, telling the government that Washington finds it impossible to pledge money for a scheme deemed to violate property and human rights. "We can only provide technical assistance … consistent with our laws," he said.

While the UK and most donors do accept the economic and political imperatives of land redistribution in Zimbabwe, they point to neighbouring South Africa as an example for Zimbabwe to follow. There, the government has opted to buy land for the resettlement of blacks from willing white sellers.

In part, the donors' reluctance also reflects misgivings about the way land redistribution has operated in Zimbabwe in the past. The first programme in the 1980s, in which 70,000 blacks were resettled instead of the target figure of 162,000, was marked by public accusations that land earmarked for small-scale farmers was instead diverted to influential figures, charges that President Mugabe's government denies.

The UK, which aided Zimbabwe's first land plan because it was based on a willing-seller, willing-buyer policy, argues that it cannot do so now because the current programme fails to recognize fundamental property rights, is not transparent and does not address poverty issues.

'We can no longer wait for promises'

Meanwhile, land-hungry villagers have fired warning shots of their own, expressing growing impatience with the government's failure to fulfill promises to give them land when independence first was achieved 18 years ago. In the past several months, thousands of villagers in various parts of the country have seized prime commercial land, most of it owned by whites, to resettle themselves illegally. The villagers have vowed not to move out of the prop-

erties, saying the government is not serious about addressing their plight. In the words of one angry villager, "We can no longer wait for promises and more promises."

The government has appealed to the villagers to end their occupation of the farms, but has not taken any steps to forcibly remove them. President Mugabe has been wary not to act harshly against the villagers and is acutely aware of the explosive nature of the problem, especially at a time of widespread public discontent over the country's severe economic difficulties.

President Mugabe told the land summit, "We must move forward speedily and vigorously [with the land plan] ... otherwise they, the people, will resettle themselves in a manner they deem appropriate. Such anarchy will not be helpful to anyone. We therefore trust that the government's efforts for orderly resettlement will receive the necessary [donors'] support."

President Mugabe has said in numerous speeches that he sees no reason why the government should pay for land which was "stolen" by British colonialists. He says the government is happy to pay for improvements made on the farms, but "will not pay for the soil — it is God-given and belongs to the people."

Influential groups such as the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU), the umbrella body for Zimbabwe's white commercial farmers, have acknowledged the need for the government to address landlessness, but are unhappy about the methods used, such as the 1992 law giving the government unchallenged powers to virtually seize any land or farm, paying only what it considers fair compensation. They agree that resettlement is crucial for stability, but that full compensation based on the market value of the farms must be paid.

While debate on the merits and de-merits of Zimbabwe's land redistribution plan rages, most Zimbabweans and economic analysts have been largely concerned about its effect on output in agriculture, the economic mainstay of a nation which normally has been a food exporter to its poorer neighbours.

"The equitable distribution of productive capital such as land is not only economically important but also essential to ensure peace and stability."

— Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

The government has made the point that small-scale farmers, if given enough land and the tools to farm, can be as productive as the commercial farmers. Indeed, black farmers now grow about 70 per cent of Zimbabwe's staple, maize. Before independence, most maize was grown by the commercial farmers, with peasant farmers growing just enough for their own needs. Thus, the government points out, land redistribution would not only alleviate poverty among rural blacks — the majority population — but also help stimulate agricultural output overall.

Nevertheless, some economists have warned that if the plan is implemented as it now stands, the key tobacco sector, Zimbabwe's single largest exporter earner, will be hard hit. They estimate that it will lose 50 per cent of its total annual production of 230 mn kilograms of flue-cured tobacco by 1999. Tobacco currently nets about US$330 mn a year in foreign exchange.

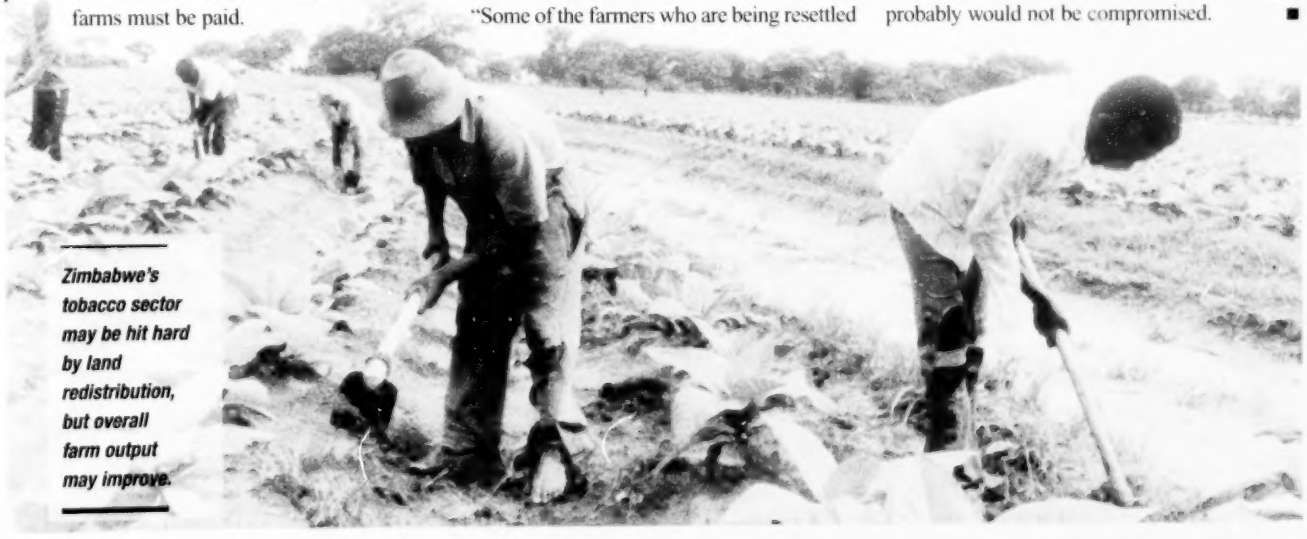
Under the government's land plan, 700 of the nation's tobacco farms are among the total of 1,500 farms earmarked for imminent seizure and resettlement of landless farmers. "Taking that land [the tobacco farms] out of production will probably halve production," independent Zimbabwean economist John Robertson says.

"Some of the farmers who are being resettled don't have the skills or the capital that those farmers [who] will be removed from the land have. When you have 20 farmers working separately where you used to have one farmer with a consolidated approach, they are likely to spend years trying to figure out who gets what resources."

Although the government emphasizes that resettlement is needed to relieve overcrowding in the degraded rural communal areas, it also says that some of the new settlers will be trained farmers or those with adequate funds to farm productively.

Some of the analysts who project a fall in farm output argue that formal sector employment, which has hardly grown from the 1.5 million workers at independence, is also likely to decline by at least 15 per cent, since agriculture provides the inputs for most local industries.

But Professor Sam Moyo of the Southern Africa Regional Institute for Policy Studies, a local think-tank, answers that some of these projections are exaggerated by whites worried about losing their land and privileged economic status in a country where 70 per cent of blacks live below the poverty line. Prof. Moyo, who has studied Zimbabwe's land question extensively, says that some of the 1,500 farms already identified for compulsory acquisition by the government are not in the fertile and heavy rainfall regions, where most crops are produced, but in relatively poorer and drier regions, although still better than in the communal lands where peasant farmers currently live. Therefore, he says, overall farm output probably would not be compromised. ■



Zimbabwe's tobacco sector may be hit hard by land redistribution, but overall farm output may improve.

Namibia moves cautiously on land deals

Redistribution programme seeks to preserve property rights

By **Peter Mwaura**

Eight years after independence, thousands of Namibians remain landless and poor. The problem of access to land is so sensitive that President Sam Nujoma recently said that failure to immediately address the need for land redistribution could lead to a second revolution in the country. But in face of conflicting social and political pressures, the government is pursuing a careful and measured course. Anxious to avoid chaos during the process of land distribution, it has been devising clearly-defined and systematic programmes of land acquisition and distribution, although President Nujoma has acknowledged that these have been "painfully slow."

Namibia inherited from its colonial past a landholding system in which 74 per cent of the best arable land is owned by some 4,000 white farmers, while the majority of Namibians live on crowded communal lands. However, the Namibian constitution — widely hailed as a model for other African countries — entrenches property rights, including the right of all people to own land and bequeath it to their heirs. Therefore, land can only be expropriated by the state "in the public interest" and "subject to the payment of just compensation, in accordance with requirements and procedures to be determined by Act of parliament."

Accordingly, the government has been buying land from white farmers on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis, to resettle poor and landless Namibians. The process has been slow and expensive, as prices of land have tended to go up and not enough white farmers are willing to sell their farms to the government at reasonable rates. At the end of 1997, the Deputy Lands Principal Secretary in the Namibian Ministry of Lands, Mr. John Mbango, complained that the ministry is experiencing difficulties buying enough land due to "inflated and unrealistic" prices set by white farmers.

Such difficulties have fueled sharp criticisms of the government's methodical approach. Mr. Mike Venaani, Secretary-General of the opposition Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, has warned that the land issue has whipped up enormous emotions since independence in 1990. If incorrectly handled, he said, the problem could transform a peaceful Namibia into "a sea of flames overnight."

Trade unions associated with the ruling party, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), also have urged the restitution of land. They have called on the government to seize land without paying compensation, since the land was "stolen" by the colonizers. This would require changing Article 16 of the constitution. National Union of Namibian Workers President Ponhele ya France says the constitution was made by the people and should be changed by the people. "To pay for our own land is a waste of money," he says. "We are opposed to it. The land was given to generals of the [colonial occupation] wars as compensation. We also have our generals. The land must be appropriated." (SWAPO fought for nearly three decades in a guerrilla war to free Namibia from illegal occupation by South Africa.)

'We have to be leaders'

The government, however, is averse to grabbing land, Prime Minister Hage Geingob told *Africa Recovery* in an interview. "I ask people who are saying change the constitution: What constitution are you going to change? The constitution talks about property rights. We are honouring property rights. I ask them: Do you want me to come to your house and grab your suits?

"The moment you bring it down to the basics, they don't know what they are talking about. We are honouring property rights. And we are going to have lawlessness the moment you start dishonouring property rights. You grab today from this one, tomorrow we grab from you."

Mr. Geingob emphasized: "We have to be leaders, even when people are shouting about grabbing land. Leaders have to be fair, provide justice. They must lead."

Three-quarters of the best arable land is owned by 4,000 white farmers, while the majority of Namibians live on crowded communal lands.

Namibia's Agriculture - Namibia Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

He added: "You should know that some people are shouting because they want to come into power. They are failing to see weaknesses in the government, so they must pick up something to get us. They just want to make noise so that they may be voted in."

Thorny issues

Soon after independence, Prime Minister Geingob organized a land conference with participants from all sections of Namibian society. "We debated and debated and came to a very good understanding," he said. The conference agreed that land belonging to absentee landlords would be seized and redistributed to the poor and landless. Land that was idle or underutilized would be the next target.

But grabbing underutilized land was not a straightforward matter, Mr. Geingob noted. "How do you determine something is underutilized? This year you had rain, therefore the land is utilized. The following year you have drought, and it is not utilized. Are you going to grab it?"

The conference also could not resolve the problem of ancestral land. "Those who claim ancestral land say they are the original owners of the country, as their ancestors lived in certain areas," the prime minister said. "Now, who do we give it to? To the Hereros? To the San people? Land in Windhoek [the capital] did belong to some people. Do we give it back to them? Certain things are impractical."

The Namibia Society for Human Rights (NSHR) argues that it would be difficult to determine who are the rightful owners. Most Namibians moved into the country from the Great Lakes region around the 14th century; while others arrived in the 16th and 19th centuries. If anything, the NSHR says, the San people are the rightful owners of the land, since "they have been living here for at least 30,000 years, but they are discriminated against by everyone." The San, were driven into the arid lands by the newcomers and today only about 70,000 or so have survived in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana and Namibia. Of the 30,000 San in Namibia, the bulk are landless, except for some 2,000 who live in Bushmanland.

The conference faced similar problems with "stolen land" — farms acquired by white colonists. "People say stolen land cannot be bought; grab it," Mr. Geingob noted. "Now, we took an oath as leaders to do justice. Everybody has human rights, including the whites. If a white person 100 years ago stole the land, is it fair to grab that land from [the descendant of] that white person because it happens to be stolen land? Are you going to visit the sins of the father on the child?"

"To the white people we say: Look, we talk about reconciliation. You are also in this country, you must do something, meet us half way. Why don't you also give up some land voluntarily.... So sometimes it's a question of convincing people to do the right thing."

— Hage Geingob
Prime Minister of Namibia

Agence Namibienne de Presse (Nampa)

Appeals to white farmers

President Nujoma has called on white farmers to be "bold and sincere" in how they offer their land for sale. "It will not contribute to the success of equitable land redistribution if farmers and other land owners are only prepared to offer land that is less economical, or when prices for the farms or the improvements made to the land are inflated beyond their real cost." Such actions, he said, are hindering the government's efforts to acquire land, and thus hinder the government's policy of national reconciliation.

Mr. Geingob too has been appealing to white farmers to voluntarily give up their underused or unused lands for resettlement. "To the white people we say: Look, we talk about reconciliation. You are also in this country, you must do something, meet us half way. Why don't you also give up some land voluntarily?" One rich man, after talking to President Nujoma, gave six farms to the government for settlement. "So sometimes it's a question of convincing people to do the right thing," Mr. Geingob remarked.

However, the main organization of commercial farmers, the Namibia Agricultural Union, has remained critical of the resettlement programme, accusing the government of turning productive commercial farming land into communal areas. It says this not only destroys the fragile ecology of the land, but also exacerbates poverty. Productivity, it argues, would not be achieved by expanding the land farmed under conditions similar to those in the communal areas.

The government agrees that productivity is crucial to the success of resettlement. Prime Minister Geingob said that the government must convince "those who are land hungry that it is not just a question of having the land and sitting and saying, aha, I have land now — but of working on it. Productivity is very important."

Preserving access to communal lands

In fact, the problem of land redistribution also involves the communal lands, which are under the control of chiefs who traditionally allocate land to their subjects. Before the government stopped the practice, however, well-to-do individuals were fencing off large chunks of land, thereby excluding other users. Some government ministers were accused of this practice.

"If a minister goes back home, he can get a piece of land from the chief," Mr. Geingob explained. "Not only ministers, everybody. But of course, there is the pretension that ministers getting anything is corruption.... We have solved the problem of fencing off communal land by saying only a maximum of 10 hectares can be fenced — if you want to have a little place you can call your own. That is reasonable. But if you want to get rich, get a big farm, then go and buy commercial land."

Given the numerous unresolved questions about land resettlement in Namibia, a committee, chaired by President Nujoma himself, has been set up. According to Mr. Geingob, this is so that "the land question can be revisited again, involve all the players and come up with some solutions." ■

In the next issue:
Feature on Namibia

One of the most peaceful and investor-friendly nations in Southern Africa since it won its independence in 1990, Namibia today benefits from extensive mineral wealth and other economic attributes, but also suffers from a legacy of stark social inequities and widespread poverty. In the next issue of* Africa Recovery, *we will look at the development challenges confronting Namibia and its people.

Redividing land can boost output

Success depends on reversing policy bias against African smallholders

By **Henk-Jan Brinkman**

Some of those who argue against the redistribution of land from large commercial farmers to smallholders in both Namibia and Zimbabwe maintain that agricultural production would be adversely affected and the environment degraded. But experience in other parts of Africa and elsewhere shows that distribution could in fact increase productivity and ease environmental pressures. Redistribution also would be socially and politically beneficial.

Increased productivity, however, is not straightforward. Average costs per unit of output generally are not very different on small and large farms, since economies of scale are generally insignificant at the farm level. This is because land can be tilled by hand and hoe or with a tractor and plow, while most inputs, such as land, livestock, fertilizers, seeds and pesticides, can be easily divided up. Very few inputs cannot be divided, or have large fixed costs which reduce the average cost per unit of output when overall output is larger.

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Meanwhile, the costs of supervising labourers increases with the size of the farm. Such costs are particularly important in agriculture because tasks on farms are spaced out over area and time. So family farms, where the operator is also the owner, are often the most productive.

Inputs of labour are often high on family farms, since family members have high incentives to work hard. They are not paid by the hour and have few alternative opportunities, given the frequent lack of off-farm wage employment. They are, therefore, likely to work long hours. In many parts of the world, the combination of the lack of economies of scale, low supervision costs and high labour input on family farms means that productivity actually may be higher on smaller farms.

This relation, however, can be disturbed by imperfect markets, policies that favour large farms, or by economies of scale in processing or agricultural support services, such as distribution, extension, and storage. For example, it is often easier for owners of large farms to get credit because they have more land to use as collateral. Moreover, governments all over the world have favoured larger farms through subsidies, taxes and interventions in land, output, and labour markets, or in the provision of transportation, extension, research and other services. Such policy measures have greatly increased the profitability of large farms. In South Africa, the profitability of large farms was aided by the elimination of African tenancy through the Land Act of 1913, restrictions on African labour movements through the pass laws and subsidies for mechanization.

Partly as a result of such imperfect markets and policy distortions, in some countries in Africa the evidence of an inverse relationship between farm size and land productivity is more mixed than elsewhere in the world. Large farms often have been more profitable, particularly in eastern and southern Africa. Large farms frequently occupy land of higher quality, have better access to credit and extension

Agricultural extension agent meets with Zimbabwean farmers: for land redistribution to work, small farmers need more support and services.

services and use more non-labour inputs, such as fertilizer, pesticides, high-yield seed varieties, and irrigation, thanks to subsidies and institutions favouring large farms.

Indeed, some argue that discrimination against smallholders in Africa has been the most severe in the world. Output by smallholders therefore should increase when the policy bias against them declines, as has happened in Kenya, for example.

Equity and environmental concerns

Another argument in favour of land redistribution is based on equity considerations. Economists often maintain there is a trade-off between efficiency and equity. But as the evidence on the productivity of small farms shows, this tradeoff usually does not exist in the case of land redistribution. There is little dispute about the fairness of land redistribution, since the existing distribution of land is usually the result of violence, coercive actions, and/or discriminatory policies. As the unequal distribution of land in many countries was often secured by force, it also has frequently led to long and violent strife. Land redistribution therefore can contribute to social and political stability, as it has in some Asian countries. This is important in African countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

In addition, land redistribution in some countries is also important for environmental reasons, since the overuse of land, as in the crowded communal areas of Zimbabwe and Namibia, needs to be reduced. Environmental degradation is a particular problem in areas where poverty is combined with high population growth and land scarcity. In high-risk situations, where short-term subsistence is at stake and the ecological balance is fragile, individual producers may choose — or feel obliged to choose — cultivation or grazing practices that are environmentally damaging, regardless of tenure arrangements and population pressure. Yet, high population growth rates exacerbate the process, since they bring larger livestock herds and higher demands for land and fuelwood. If, on top of that, land is scarce, farms will become smaller, fallow periods will become shorter, use of marginal land will increase, and improper irrigation methods will become more widespread.

Countries such as Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, and Senegal have seen an increasing fragmentation of land holdings, with the average smallholder farm size declining as a result of higher population density. Land redistribution and measures to raise productivity on small farms can break this severe problem.

Redistribution alone is not enough

Policies biased against smallholders have been widespread in Africa. Research, extension services, seed and fertilizer delivery systems, marketing and transportation often are focused disproportionally on large farms. This bias may have economic reasons. Financial institutions are less likely to provide credit to smallholders because of the inadequate collateral and high administrative and transaction costs compared to loan size.

Overall, land redistribution can yield positive results because of the higher productivity on smaller farms and the benefits to equity and the environment.

Moreover, poor farmers are reluctant to take risks because they are preoccupied with short-term subsistence, partly explaining why they often adopt new technologies, such as hybrid seeds, only slowly. This preoccupation with survival is heightened if farmers have difficulty obtaining credit that could help them bridge a period with a poor harvest. Poor farmers will adopt new technologies if they are clearly superior to the traditional ones, that is, cheaper, with less variance in yields and with a lower risk of failure. But so far national and international research institutes have focused too much on export crops and too little on the development of drought-resistant, low-risk and low-cost innovations for rainfed food agriculture that do not need many external inputs.

The success of land redistribution depends critically on the availability of credit, marketing, roads, water, extension services and improved technologies such as hybrid seeds. Governments are likely to be involved in creating the institutions that deliver these services to smallholders yet the farmers themselves can also be involved, for example, in the construction of infrastructure. Without credit, farmers might not be able to buy inputs such as seeds and fertilizer and might be forced to sell the land at times of poor weather. Extension services are crucial to teach farmers about farming techniques and new technologies they might not be familiar with. This played an important role in the success of the land reforms that Kenya started in the 1950s.

However, there have been cases in which public marketing institutions have been dismantled, while a private-sector marketing capacity has been lagging or while private traders have used their power to profit unfairly from smallholders, particularly in remote areas.

Taxes, subsidies and other biases in favour of large farms need to be dismantled before land redistribution begins, as South Africa has done by reducing capital subsidies for large farmers. If this is not done, land prices are likely to be higher than the profits smallholders can expect, despite the higher productivity on smaller farms. With such distortions still in place, resettled farmers are likely to go bankrupt, possibly leading to a reconcentration of land holdings.

Resettlement

Land redistribution is much more difficult when it also involves resettlement. Land reforms in Asia often involved the transfer of ownership to tenants who were already farming on their land and had the necessary skills and knowledge. In Africa, however, resettlement is more common and the selection of farmers therefore becomes a crucial issue.

Evidence shows that farmers who are married and under 45 years of age, have larger families, are better educated, and who have farming experience and skills are more likely to be successful as settlers. Surprisingly, the amount of capital does not appear to be an important factor in predicting success. The involvement of local communities and local governments also contributes to the success of land redistribution.

Another indicator of success is the willingness of farmers to pay for the land. However, poor farmers without equity are unlikely to be able to pay market value, even if they have access to credit, since they have to pay a risk premium if they have no collateral. Grants therefore are needed to cover at least the risk premium to allow farmers to purchase land. Yet the larger the grant, the fewer the number of farmers who can be assisted.

Overall, land redistribution can yield positive results because of the higher productivity on smaller farms and the benefits to equity and the environment. But it needs to be combined with additional institutions and policies that ensure the availability of credit, marketing, extension services and new technology for the newly settled smallholders. ■

AIDS hits young people the hardest

Awareness campaigns must aim at curbing HIV infection rates among sub-Saharan youth

By **Jacqueline Irving**

The HIV/AIDS epidemic "disproportionately" affects the world's children and young adults, particularly girls and young women, says the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). With rising rates of HIV infection in the general population, new infections are increasingly concentrated in young people, according to the *AIDS Epidemic Update: December 1998*, issued in November by UNAIDS. Half of all new HIV infections worldwide are occurring in those aged 15-24, with the epidemic inflicting an especially heavy toll on girls and young women living in sub-Saharan Africa.

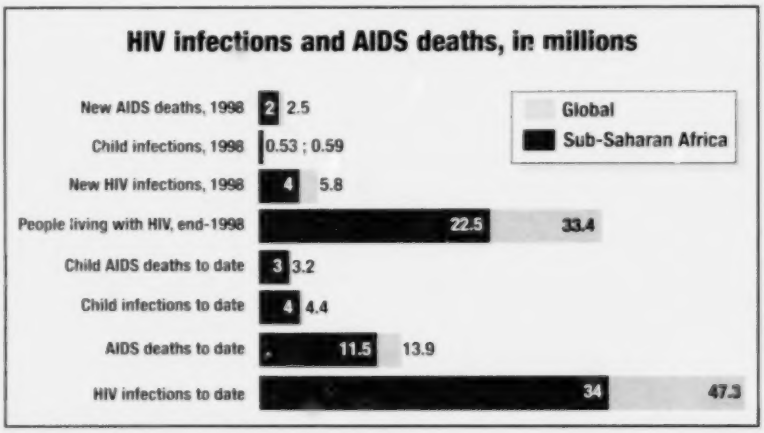
Nearly 70 per cent of all new infections this year occurred in sub-Saharan Africa, with the majority of the world's worst-affected countries in Southern Africa, the "global epicentre" of the epidemic. HIV surveillance data gathered in sub-Saharan Africa reveal that the region's girls and young women often are more prone to acquiring the HIV virus at younger ages than are boys and young men. For example, the results of a recent study conducted in one area of Kenya showed that 22 per cent of girls versus just 4 per cent of boys in the 15-19 age group were HIV positive. In a study conducted in Ethiopia for the 20-24 age group, 35.4 per cent of the young women tested HIV positive compared with just 10.7 per cent of the young men.

Females became infected as many as five to 10 years earlier than males on average — in areas both where the epidemic was mature and where it was newly emerging, according to the results of a UN Development Programme (UNDP) study carried out in 1992 (*Young Women: Silence, Susceptibility and the HIV Epidemic*). This was attributed to "biological, immunological and/or virological" factors that possibly make young women especially susceptible, as well as to the subordinate status of females in many societies.

Young women "are often unable to negotiate safe sex with their partners, and in many cases are subjected to abuse, including rape," said Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund, speaking on the occasion of World AIDS Day, 1 December. "This violence against women is exacerbated by a new form: the infection of women with HIV by spouses or partners who acquire the virus through their exploitation of sex workers," she added.

HIV/AIDS is also taking a severe toll on African children. As many as 10 per cent of all new infections are occurring in children under age 15 and 90 per cent of these young children reside in Africa, the UNAIDS report says. Progress in raising child survival rates has been reversed in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where nearly 94 per cent of the world's 3.2 million child AIDS deaths have occurred. For example, the UNAIDS report says that by 2005-10, 72 of every 1,000 infants born in Namibia are expected to die of AIDS before reaching their first birthday; in the absence of AIDS, the infant mortality rate would have been a significantly lower 45 per 1,000.

Southern Africa is the "global epicentre" of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.



Source: UNAIDS, AIDS epidemic update: December 1998

Most of the children who have lost their lives due to AIDS are believed to have become infected by the HIV virus at or before birth or while breastfeeding. In Zimbabwe, a country especially hard hit by the epidemic, blood taken from pregnant women at 23 of the total 25 surveillance sites set up for anonymous HIV testing showed that between 20-50 per cent of women tested in 1997 were infected with HIV. The prognosis for the unborn children of these mothers is alarming: mother-to-child transmission occurs in at least one-third of all cases where the mother is HIV positive.

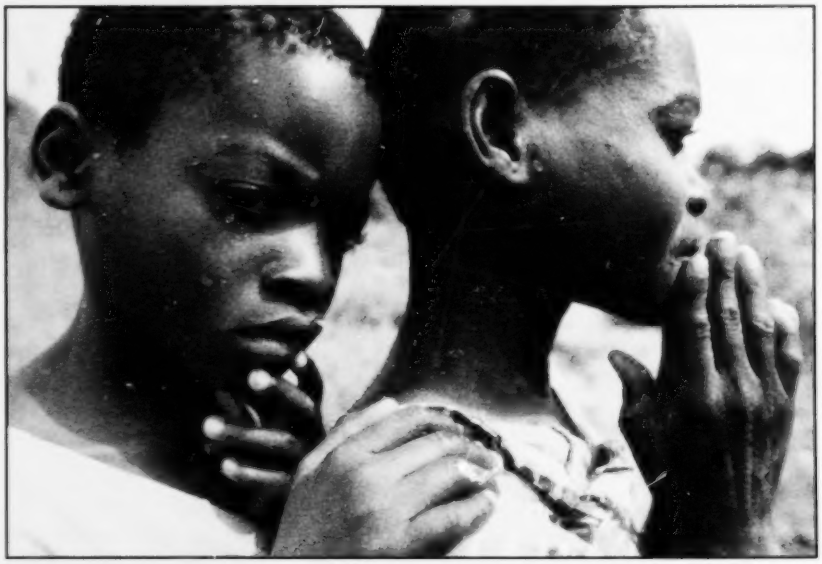
Prevention versus care

While noting that transmission rates can be cut if HIV-infected women are treated with certain drugs during pregnancy and avoid breastfeeding after giving birth, the recent UNAIDS report stresses that the "ultimate aim" must be "effective prevention" so that young women avoid getting the HIV virus. But a recent decision by the South African government to cancel a project to administer the zidovudine (AZT) drug to HIV-infected, pregnant women, sparked a passionate debate on striking the right balance between prevention and care.

Until October, a pilot project in Johannesburg had been administering a short course of AZT to 2,500 HIV-positive pregnant women, based on evidence that the treatment could cut the risk of mother-to-child transmission by as much as 50 per cent. However, South Africa's health minister, Dr. Nkosazana Zuma, cancelled the pilot project, primarily on grounds that, at a cost of $50 per treated woman, it was too expensive. Dr. Zuma argued that the money would be better spent on public prevention campaigns and condom distribution. Critics of the decision say that it has tipped the scale excessively in favour of measures that emphasize prevention over treating those already infected.

South Africa accounts for more than half of new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa and a 1997 national survey showed that one in seven pregnant women was HIV positive. South Africa is now estimated to have the second largest population of HIV-positive people worldwide (topped only by India). In addition to the subordinate status of women, factors driving the epidemic in South Africa include the end of the country's isolation in the post-apartheid era, with particularly high rates of transmission by

the many migrant workers from within and outside the country, and slow progress in implementing public information campaigns.



An AIDS victim in Malawi with her daughter: females contract HIV 5-10 years earlier than males on average.

UNICEF/Chris Adams

AIDS orphans

Another disturbing trend, indicative of how HIV and AIDS are disproportionately affecting young people, is the rising number of children orphaned by AIDS. Moreover, 95 per cent of the world's "AIDS orphans," defined by UNAIDS as children under 15 who have lost both parents or their mother to AIDS, reside in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the recent UNAIDS report.

Because new infections are increasingly concentrated in young adults — those who are likely to be raising families — the epidemic has dire implications for their children. A study conducted in Mutare, the third-largest city in Zimbabwe, already showed that nearly 15 per cent of the city's children were AIDS orphans in 1995, up from a rate of just over 10 per cent in 1992.

And when AIDS orphans turn to their extended families, they do not always get help. One study mentioned in the UNAIDS report found that, in the case of 88 per cent of households headed by orphans who had surviving adult relatives, the relatives were unwilling to care for the orphans. Nearly half of the adult relatives who do care for orphaned children are grandparents and many of these caregivers are hindered by age, sickness and/or lack of income.

A study published by UNDP in late 1997 looked at the case of children orphaned by AIDS in Kisumu and Siaya districts in Kenya and concluded that it is in the best interest of orphans to be "retained in their own communities and under the care of an adult." Moreover, the study recommended that the entire community become involved in caring for AIDS orphans in villages.

UNAIDS has pointed out that "solutions have to be found in the community," noting that many communities in Zimbabwe have made strides in this area. Several Zimbabwean village heads have set aside land for cultivation by all villagers for the purpose of feeding orphans and others suffering from AIDS. And some Zimbabwean church groups have trained women to pay regular visits to the neediest orphan-headed households within their communities. According to UNAIDS, these efforts also have the advantage of being affordable because they are community-based.

Force for change

In recognition of the growing threat that HIV/AIDS poses to young people, as well as the potential power they hold to change the epidemic's course, this year's World AIDS Campaign adopted the theme "Young People: Force for Change."

Because young people's sexual habits are more subject to change, AIDS awareness campaigns geared specifically for them have proved effective in encouraging them to adopt safer behaviour from the beginning of their sexual lives. Campaigns aimed at young people in Uganda, Tanzania and Senegal — countries that have succeeded in curbing infection rates — are often held up as models for other African countries. Intensive efforts to educate young people and distribution of free condoms are the key elements behind the success of these campaigns.

AIDS specialists consider awareness campaigns to be the only way in which the epidemic can be brought under control in developing countries, in the absence of a viable vaccine. ■

New vaccine projects target African HIV strains

Two innovative research projects launched in November aim to develop cheap, safe and effective AIDS vaccines targeted specifically at HIV virus strains most common in Africa.

These initiatives — a UK-Kenyan partnership and a US-South African collaboration — intend to produce a successful vaccine priced cheaply enough for widespread use in poor countries, in exchange for total start-up funding of $9.1 mn raised by the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI). A small, US-based non-profit organization, the IAVI aims to expedite HIV vaccine testing in developing countries.

Scientists consider the start-up funding sufficient to begin human testing in Kenya and South Africa within the next few years.

The UK-Kenyan project, which joins researchers at Oxford University and the University of Nairobi, is developing a two-step vaccine using genetic matter extracted from the HIV virus and genetically engineered animal vaccinia virus. (A strain of vaccinia virus was used to eradicate smallpox.)

The US-South African project links the University of North Carolina and AlphaVax, a small US-based biotechnology company, with the University of Cape Town. The vaccine being developed uses an altered strain of Venezuela equine encephalitis virus, a tropical microbe.

In early lab and animal tests, both vaccines appear to successfully trigger the immune system to produce cells that hinder HIV infection.

Because the HIV virus is highly variable, many consider the development of a viable vaccine to be a remote dream. Nevertheless, some 30 vaccines reportedly are at various stages of research and/or testing.

Campaign to kick polio out of Africa

Eradication effort, led by WHO, sets example for other health programmes

By **Danièle Letoré**

Health professionals and political leaders in Africa are gearing up for the final push to wipe out the remaining pockets of polio on the continent. "Polio eradication by the year 2000 is within our grasp," says Dr. Ebrahim M. Samba, Regional Director for Africa of the World Health Organization (WHO). "We are reaching levels of immunization that have never before been achieved in Africa."

Poliomyelitis, commonly referred to as polio, is a disease that once struck across the world, each year paralyzing hundreds of thousands of children during the early years of their lives (see box). "Lameness surveys" carried out in the 1970s established that polio was endemic in Africa. Today, the poliovirus is confined to sub-Saharan Africa, but with major reservoirs in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. Remarkable progress has been made in combating polio country by country in the last decade, although much remains to be done.

The current drive for full eradication is critical, since the virus easily crosses borders and countries considered free of the disease may become re-infected as a result of international travel. The worldwide campaign led by WHO to completely eliminate the disease is now focusing on the only two major areas of virus transmission remaining globally: the Indian subcontinent and sub-Saharan Africa.

"We shall immunize every child in Africa to get rid of this terrible disease forever."

—Nelson Mandela
South African President

'Kick polio out'

The goal of eradicating polio by the year 2000 was first set at a 1988 assembly of WHO member states. The following year, after another such assembly approved a Plan of Action for a Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the WHO Regional Committee for Africa took up the assembly's resolution, and in 1995 again urged the vigorous implementation of the strategies for the polio eradication initiative. The Organization of African Unity, at its annual summit meeting of African heads of state in 1996, endorsed the eradication initiative.

South African President Nelson Mandela personally led a region-wide social mobilization campaign to boost public awareness of the initiative. "We shall immunize every child in Africa to get rid of this terrible disease forever," Mr. Mandela declared at the launch of his "Kick polio out of Africa campaign." Since 1997, through an alliance with the African Football Confederation, leading players from across the continent have participated in public awareness campaigns by distributing posters, conducting radio interviews and holding public autograph sessions. Public service announcements over radio stations have spread news of the campaign to as many communities across Africa as possible.

The polio eradication initiative is based on a four-pronged strategy that has proven effective in other areas of the world (such as the Americas, which have been certified polio-free since 1994). "The backbone of the eradication initiative," says Dr. Bruce Aylward, global coordinator for the polio eradication initiative, "is routine immunization supplemented, particularly in those countries where routine immunization has not always been possible, by National Immunization Days." Such NIDs, he explains, have bolstered immunization programmes in many countries by providing training for vaccine budgeting, planning and social mobilization at the local level, refurbishing the systems for keeping the vaccine in cold storage, and helping educate communities about the importance of routine immunization.

NIDs aim to administer oral polio vaccine in two doses to all children under five years of age nationwide. Each participating child is immunized at two NIDs held one month apart. Within the next year, NIDs will be scheduled to ensure that immunization also occurs in countries of continuing conflict such as Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where massive immunization campaigns have had to be postponed.

In addition to routine immunization and NIDs, two other components are central to the eradication initiative: surveillance and "mopping up." According to Dr. Okwo-Bele, Regional Advisor for the Expanded Programme on Immunization in Africa, "Surveillance is a key factor in identifying and controlling disease. In 1997 and 1998 we have trained surveil-

Danièle Letoré is an Information Officer of the World Health Organization in Geneva.

Vaccination key in eliminating polio

Poliomyelitis, the infectious disease commonly known as polio, is caused by three different types of poliovirus that can result in permanent paralysis or even death. Under certain conditions, poliovirus can be transmitted very easily and can survive for a limited time in the environment. Carried via contaminated drinking water or contaminated surfaces, such as unwashed hands, the virus passes through the stomach and establishes itself in the intestinal lining, where it infects cells and replicates.

Most poliovirus infections are without symptoms, however. Clinical symptoms manifest themselves in just 0.1 to 1 per cent of all cases of infection, ranging from fever, sore throat, headache, vomiting and minor muscle pain to meningitis (swelling of the brain) and paralysis. In cases where the infection spreads from the intestinal tract to the blood stream and the central nervous system, the poliovirus replicates in the motor neurons of the spinal chord, destroying cells and causing paralysis.

When the poliovirus causes paralysis, it most often affects the legs. Many victims of acute flaccid paralysis caused by the poliovirus recover at least partial muscle function. From 2 to 10 per cent of all cases of paralytic poliomyelitis are fatal, as the virus paralyzes the muscles required to breathe.

The natural occurrence of the disease (through "wild" poliovirus) has effectively been eliminated in the Western hemisphere through widespread vaccination. The polio vaccine takes two forms: an inactivated poliovirus, which is injected, and a live poliovirus, which is given orally. Because it is inexpensive and easily administered, the oral vaccine has been used extensively in the campaign to eradicate polio. Global eradication of polio is technically feasible, since the virus only affects humans (there are no enduring, environmental sources of the virus) and protection via immunization lasts a lifetime.

Marie-Isabelle Pinto

A child being immunized against polio in southern Sudan: Africa could soon eradicate the disease completely.

lance teams in 36 countries to be able to identify 'acute flaccid paralysis,' a symptom that can often mean that poliovirus is present." In later stages of eradicating poliovirus from a particular geographic area, mopping up involves door-to-door campaigns in the remaining population pockets where surveillance has shown that the virus transmission persists.

Dramatic drop in cases

The first NIDs for polio eradication in Africa were carried out in 1995 in Algeria, Mauritania and Namibia. In 1997, 36 African countries participated in NIDs, immunizing more than 85 mn children under the age of five years. In just two years, the number of reported polio cases in Africa dropped dramatically — from 2,198 in 1995 to an estimated 879 in 1997.

These figures are likely to underestimate the actual number of cases, however, since surveillance systems are in the early stages of development. And although no wild poliovirus has been isolated in Eastern and Southern Africa since 1996, more sensitive surveillance is required in these regions before polio-free status can be confirmed.

"With the success of the NIDs, the emphasis is shifting to establishing the surveillance needed to guide polio eradication activities and eventually certify its success," says Dr. Okwo-Bele. "Every African parent and health worker must understand that acutely paralyzed children need to be brought to a health facility for investigation."

Because viruses do not observe man-made borders, there is always a possibility that poliovirus may reappear in countries deemed polio-free and be exported to others through international travel and population migration. In 1993-94, polio spread from Angola to Namibia and from Zaire (as the Democratic Republic of Congo was then known) to Zambia and Tanzania. Laboratory tests identified a strain of poliovirus that travelled from Nigeria across West Africa.

Therefore, another important element in the fight against polio is a strong laboratory network, capable of isolating the different types of poliovirus, of which there are three. Such a network is instrumental in genetically mapping the virus, to trace its country of origin and determine appropriate immunization strategies. Over the last five years, WHO has been developing and strengthening a laboratory network in Africa. Today there are 10 national laboratories and three regional laboratories as part of the African Polio Laboratory

"We are building national capacity by providing training throughout the laboratory network," states Dr. Okwo-Bele. "This has direct benefits for other healthcare programmes, allowing the region to improve disease diagnostics, help pre-empt future epidemics and encourage the roll-out of other vaccines."

Strong partnerships

Much of the work, however, could not be accomplished without the commitment of national governments and the help of WHO's partners. Rotary International, the worldwide business and professional organization, has provided funding as well as an invaluable number of volunteers to help carry out NIDs and social mobilization campaigns, and provide advocacy assistance. The UN Children's Fund and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention regularly provide technical help. Other governmental agencies such as the US Agency for International Development, the UK Department for International Development, Danish International Development Assistance and the Japan International Cooperation Agency have been instrumental in providing resources for the polio eradication campaign.

The campaign has been notable for its success in bringing together governments, donors, the media, industries, health workers, national and community leaders, citizens, volunteers and private voluntary organizations in an extraordinary international effort to wipe out polio. Through the campaign, neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia have worked together to immunize their children. Health workers have collaborated to develop innovative strategies to reach remote groups of people, such as forest-dwelling Pygmies in Uganda.

By strengthening primary healthcare services and bringing renewed enthusiasm and support for other immunization campaigns, the polio eradication campaign has brought significant additional benefits to the African region. In Zimbabwe, the polio model was used to carry out a measles control campaign. Botswana, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa included measles vaccine in their polio NIDs. In East Africa, yellow fever control is benefiting from the infrastructure built up by the polio eradication initiative.

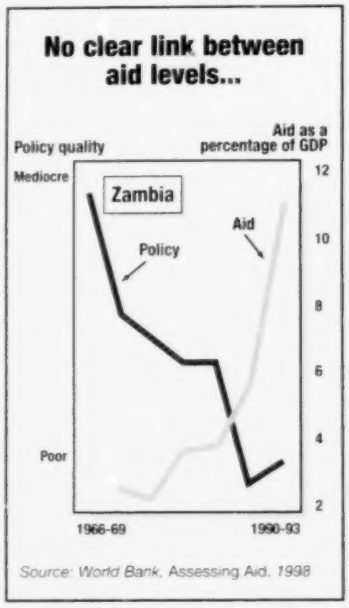
In Madagascar, "NIDs brought new life to the routine immunization programme and the whole health system — new refrigerators, greater staff involvement and government awareness that good health is good politics," notes Dr. Harry Hull, a WHO medical officer.

Dr. Samba cautions, however, that the gains already achieved against polio should not now lead to complacency. "We are at the most difficult stage of the initiative," he notes. "It is not a question of just maintaining immunization levels. We must now increase immunization activities (NIDs and mop-ups) in the face of disappearing disease. This requires tremendous political leadership and commitment, as well as increased funding. If these components are assured, we will win the battle against polio." ■

Assessing aid

from page 1

The report argues that the picture becomes clearer when aid recipient countries are divided into two groups according to the "soundness" of their economic policies. Aid can be an important stimulus to economic growth and lead to a faster decline in poverty in those countries with "sound economic management." This is defined as free-market policies that aim for low inflation, low budget deficits, openness to trade, and so on, complemented by strong institutions that discourage corruption and protect property rights. In countries with "unsound economic management" — where production incentives are weak and institutions undermined by corruption provide inadequate protection of property rights — the authors cite research findings showing that "whatever the amount of aid ... growth was miniscule, or even negative."



Source: *World Bank, Assessing Aid, 1998*

According to the report, aid flows to countries pursuing "sound" economic policies have the bonus effect of boosting private-sector confidence, thereby "crowding in" further capital inflows. The authors put specific figures to this claim: aid finance equivalent to 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) attracts an additional 1.9 per cent of GDP in private investment. But in "unsound" policy countries, aid has a "crowding out" effect on private investment.

Assessing Aid "makes the important point that good policies have a major bearing on poverty reduction," Mr. Kevin Watkins, Senior Policy Advisor of Oxfam, a major UK-based international non-governmental organization, commented to *Africa Recovery*. But in "making a case for cost-efficient aid, what is the policy conclusion? That you should put all aid in high performing countries? It's an incredibly 19th century, utilitarian perspective.... The cost of Oxfam operating in a country like Mozambique is incredibly high as compared with a country like Bangladesh. Is the inference that we should withdraw resources from [Mozambique], ignore the poor there and put those resources in Bangladesh?"

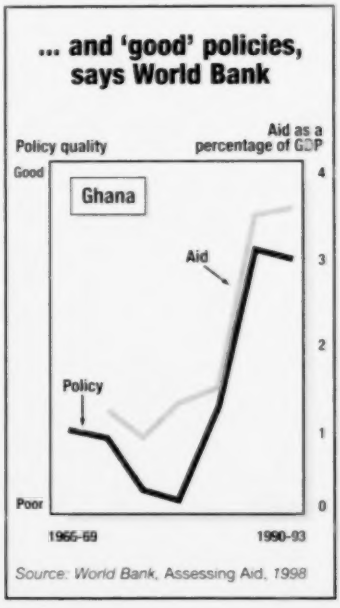
By addressing the issue of how aid as a scarce resource should be allocated most effectively, the report "points us in the direction of a very interesting question," Mr. Watkins acknowledged. "But they are defining 'effectively' purely in terms of rate of return. So they haven't really helped us answer the question."

Inefficient aid

The report states that aid money was disbursed "in equal amounts to well managed countries and to poorly managed ones," up until the last few years. But many poverty-stricken, "good" policy countries, such as Uganda and Ethiopia, have received a smaller per capita share of aid than have countries pursuing less "sound" policies.

Aid allocations by bilateral and multilateral donors in the 1970-93 period were driven largely by political or strategic considerations — and so were not necessarily directed to where they would yield the highest returns, the report explains. Further inefficiencies in aid allocation are due to less densely populated countries generally getting more aid per capita than do countries with higher population levels. This discriminates against larger countries, contributing to the overall weakness of the relationship between a country's aid intake and income, the report says.

But the authors believe there is now broad scope for a more focused approach to aid disbursement. They appear to discount any strong link between mass poverty and "unsound" policies, pointing to the many countries that have mass poverty but are also conforming to the global trend of economic liberalization in recent years.



Source: *World Bank, Assessing Aid, 1998*

Setting up four sub-categories to better assess the relationship between aid money and poverty reduction, the authors say aid has "high impact" in 32 countries with "poverty rates of greater than 50 per cent" but pursuing "above average" policies. This is the "good policy-high poverty" sub-category.

Aid is less effective when given to countries in the "poor policy-high poverty" and "good policy-low poverty" sub-categories. In the latter case, aid works, but the returns are not as high as they would be under the "good policy-high poverty" scenario because "there is less work for [aid] to do." Unsurprisingly, the report says that aid is least effective when it is given to countries in the "poor policy-low poverty" sub-category.

In fact, 75 per cent of the world's poor live in high impact countries, said Mr. David Dollar, the report's lead author, speaking at a Washington, DC, press conference held in November to launch the report. "One of our messages is that there have been a number of successful reforms in Africa during the 1990s, so we really have a very good environment for effective aid," Mr. Dollar added, specifically citing Ethiopia, Uganda and Ghana as being in the "high impact" group.

However, notes Mr. Watkins of Oxfam, "policy environments change quickly. If aid is a long-term business, you can't behave like a capital speculator, moving aid in and out of the biggest markets."

While generally stating its arguments coherently, *Assessing Aid* sometimes appears inconsistent in its conclusions. For example, in one analysis of the conditions for most effective aid, drawing on data covering 1970-93, the report concludes, "When low-income countries such as Mali, put good policies in place, they perform better, but they still do not match the results for the middle-income countries." Stating that there are several reasons for this outcome, the report speculates that "these countries may have other characteristics that hurt growth — being landlocked, for instance. But it is also possible that their ability to save and invest is hampered by poverty itself,

even when good policies are in place."

But elsewhere in the report, drawing on other data, the authors deem aid targeted to the world's poorest, "good" policy countries more effective in reducing poverty than aid to less-poor countries pursuing "good" policies. However, the latter conclusion is not accompanied by an explanation of how the "other characteristics" that could limit growth in the world's poorest countries are overcome. So the strength of the assumed linkage between growth and poverty reduction varies across different sections of the report.

Aid conditionality is ineffective where reforms lack "serious domestic political support," and has been "counterproductive" in some cases.

— *Assessing Aid*

Money and ideas

Even if a developing country's policies are not "sound," such a country could still benefit significantly from donor assistance, the report emphasizes. Assistance should take a form other than financial aid allocations, however. In these cases, aid "requires patience and a focus on ideas, not money." Indeed, a key theme of *Assessing Aid* is that improving aid effectiveness requires a redefinition of the role of aid — as a combination of money and ideas, with the appropriate mix tailored to suit a country's specific situation and problems.

More specifically, the authors recommend that assistance to countries with "unsound" economic management should "assume the more modest and patient role of disseminating ideas, transmitting experiences of other countries, training future policymakers and leaders, and stimulating capacity for informed policy debate within civil society." The logic behind this prescription is that, "even where money may not stick," aid projects that focus on transfers of knowledge and advice on institutional capacity improvements can have more lasting benefits.

In trying to explain why aid money continues to go to poor countries pursuing "bad" policies, *Assessing Aid* points to donors' perception of aid as an incentive for policy reform. But the report's research shows that the relationship between aid and the quality of a country's policies is not a "simple" one and "aid cannot take the lead in promoting reform if there is little local movement in that direction."

"The study highlights the absolute importance of national ownership in the origination of a reform programme and a strong body of national consensus behind it," commented Mr. Botchwey. "If there's no sufficient consensus for reform in the country, no amount of conditionality can force the country to comply if a loan is given… [so] the likelihood of a breach is very strong."

Not only does *Assessing Aid* deem conditional aid ineffective where reforms lack "serious domestic support," but it also points to situations where conditional lending might have been "counterproductive." For example, the report cites the case of Zambia to show that aid can actually enable governments to delay reforms. While Zambia's policies "were poor and getting poorer throughout 1970-93," its aid receipts increased, reaching 11 per cent of gross domestic product by the early 1990s. In Ghana, on the other hand, "bad" policies attracted little aid, while policy changes after 1983 were followed by strong aid flows.

The report's authors consider the possibility of donors correctly anticipating shifts in recipient countries' policies (from "bad" to "good") and timing aid disbursements to coincide with these policy shifts to spur reform. But they conclude that donors have not been successful in predicting these "turning points," since the data show that there is "little relationship between changes in aid and policy reform."

But appropriate timing of aid allocation can be a key means of maximizing aid's effectiveness, notes *Assessing Aid*. Indicators of progress on reform (such as a newly elected government) can provide cues for appropriate timing of aid disbursements. Aid disbursed too late is akin to a missed opportunity. Aid disbursed too early could delay what might have otherwise been a concrete economic policy reform programme.

Target countries, not sectors

Another common donor practice that generally does not work, according to *Assessing Aid*, is the disbursement of aid for specific sectors and/or projects. Because aid money typically is fungible — meaning that a recipient government can use the money as it chooses — much of the targeted money never reaches the sectors or projects for which it is intended, the report points out. In this part of the analysis, the report says neither corruption nor other administrative interference explains this characteristic of aid flows. Rather, it is due to the economic principle that a person or country will "rationally" allocate (or reallocate) scarce resources. And even when successfully channeled, aid's impact is limited unless it produces more systemic, economy-wide change, the report says.

The authors find that channeling sector or project-specific aid to many African countries generally is easier because donors tend to have stronger control of projects in this region. But this tendency — which is due to the fact that

Some World Bank findings and observations on aid

- There is little or no relationship between aid and per capita growth in developing countries.
- There is "surprisingly little" or no relationship at all between the amount of aid that countries receive and the quality of their policies.
- Being a former colony of a major donor is more valuable in attracting bilateral aid than having good management.
- In countries with good management, aid spurs growth, reduces poverty and helps attract private investment.
- There is a "long legacy of failed adjustment lending" where there was no strong domestic constituency for reform. "It is worth thinking about how to create reformers and popular movements for reform, but it will not be easy."
- Aid largely finances government consumption, which has no positive effect on growth. This helps explain why aid is not fueling growth in many developing countries.
- Well-managed countries "force coordination on donors, but in the weak environments donors often run amok."
- Donors should worry less about planting their flags on particular projects and more about how communities, governments and donors are working together to improve services.
- Studies commissioned by multilateral development banks have concluded that loan quantity has been given priority over loan quality.

World Bank / John Maier

The World Bank says the point is not how much a country spends on infrastructure and other key areas, but how well it spends available aid funds.

the bulk of capital expenditure is donor-financed (up to 87 per cent for projects in Uganda) and "the lack of strong budgetary control by either [the recipient] government or society over public investment" — raises other problems. Cited by the report as a "major weakness of aid in Africa," the resultant pattern of donor-driven priorities often impedes the ability of recipient governments to set their own priorities and undermines their commitment to projects that need continuing finance.

While *Assessing Aid* devotes considerable attention to certain donor practices that do not work, the vital question of how donors could ensure that a larger portion of aid money actually reaches its destination remains largely unanswered. The report notes that the administrative costs associated with a "typical" World Bank project are about $1 mn. And it is widely known that a significant amount of aid money is not actually spent in recipient countries. Much of it goes into donor agency overheads, expatriate consultancy fees and procurement from donor country suppliers. Calling for a review of the ways in which aid is structured and provided, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended last April that donors aim to ensure that "at least 50 per cent of their aid to Africa is spent in Africa."

The report does suggest that donor agencies themselves need some reform. "Loan quantity had been given primacy over loan quality," concluded World Bank and other reviews of project loan effectiveness. The report also refers to a 1992 World Bank study that noted the rise of "approval cultures" in aid agencies, which used disbursement volume to gauge success. However, *Assessing Aid* gives few details of the changes now under way in the multilateral donor agencies, other than stating that "sector-wide approaches are replacing individual projects."

In declaring that "when donor projects fail, it is often because of weak [recipient country] institutions and public organizations," *Assessing Aid* seems to put the lion's share of the blame for failed projects and the onus for policy change on recipient countries. The report even seems to endow the "soundness" of a country's institutions and policies with the ability to determine how well coordinated donor efforts will be in that country. "Well-managed countries force coordination on donors, but in the weak environments donors often run amok. It is hard to explain this, except that different donors like to 'plant their flags' on something (anything) tangible," the report states. Non-governmental organizations and African governments have often blamed weak aid coordination on competition among donors, as well as the frequent shifts in donor priorities.

Although it clearly states its preference for aid targeted at specific countries rather than specific projects or sectors, *Assessing Aid* hardly evaluates how aid has been used when it reaches "good" policy countries.

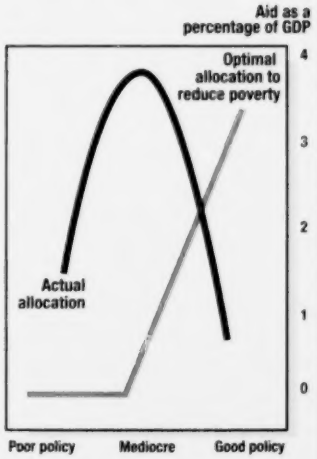
"It is important to now do a more country-specific analysis of particular types of aid, how the aid was used and the conditions that came with the money so we can form a more rigorous view of why aid of a certain quantum would have a certain effect in one country and not another," Mr. Botchwey told *Africa Recovery*.

According to Mr. Dollar, the Bank is preparing a subsequent study that will look more closely at how aid is working in eight African countries.

In spite of the inefficient patterns of aid allocation in the past, the authors of *Assessing Aid* are optimistic. The post-Cold War period has reduced competition among donors to cultivate strategic allies through aid allocations, they say. At the same time, Mr. Stiglitz notes in the report's foreword that "with the end of the Cold War, there is a group that is ... questioning [aid's] very existence in a world of integrated capital markets." The report — issued by one of the world's foremost providers of development assistance — insists that aid remains important. It expects the global trend toward economic liberalization to increase the number of countries in the "sound economic management" grouping, with positive implications for more efficient aid use. ■

Where global aid went in 1996 and where the Bank says it should go

"Poor countries with good policies should get more aid than ones with mediocre policies — but in fact they get less."



Source: World Bank, Assessing Aid, 1998

A better media image for Africa debated

Western stereotypes take a back seat as Africans accept their own responsibility

By **Salim Lone**
Cardiff, UK

A high-level international conference called to examine ways of improving Africa's image in the western media strongly concluded that this goal will only be achieved if Africa first puts its own house in order. This unexpected conclusion, from a lively and often controversial debate spread over two days in November, was yet another indication of how profoundly African thinkers over the last decade in particular have focused on addressing the continent's own weaknesses rather than highlighting the numerous international constraints that continue to hobble Africa's revival.

"Developing a more positive self-image within Africa is much more important than tackling our poor image in the western media," said Ghana's former Communication Minister **Ekwow Spio-Garbrah**.

Composed primarily of senior African journalists, influential British counterparts, and other eminent personalities from Africa and the West, participants did not spare the "sloppy, poor and sometimes dishonest" reporting practised by some foreign journalists, in the words of Mr. **Wilfred Kiboro**, Managing Director of The Nation Newspapers, East and Central Africa's largest, most successful and most respected newspaper chain, which was a principal sponsor of the conference.

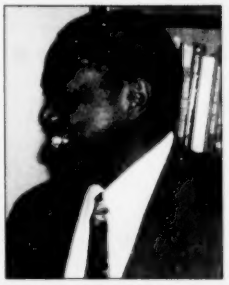
Referring to the foreign media's tendency to stereotype, Mr. Kiboro described the bizarre sight, after the August terrorist bombing in Nairobi, of western television reporters wearing jungle fatigues, cowboy hats and flak jackets — framed, of course, by some of the most modern skyscrapers in the world!

A bizarre image on TV: western reporters in Nairobi wearing jungle fatigues and flak jackets — in a setting dominated by skyscrapers!

Prime Minister **Kintu Musoke** of Uganda, in his keynote address, said stereotypical reporting, and its preoccupation with the negative, poses a threat to Africa's development by distorting international perceptions. "We are building a new Africa against many odds," he said.

The discussions reflected the self-confidence with which Africans now analyze their problems, with numerous speakers stressing the continent's need to seek full international recognition, not on the basis of pleas for fairness, but on the strength of political stability and dynamic involvement in global affairs.

Participants emphasized the importance of recognizing that many African countries have made remarkable political and economic strides in a global environment that was particularly hard on the poor countries. But the post-Cold War 1990s have also brought genocide in Rwanda and large-scale political violence and gross levels of corruption in far too many countries. So, however misleading or sensationalist some western media's Africa coverage might be, such coverage will only improve if Africa gets its act together.



UN / Milton Grant

In his keynote address, Prime Minister Kintu Musoke of Uganda said: "We are building a new Africa against many odds."

Another indication of growing self-confidence was the open manner in which African participants raised issues of unequal flows of information. Prime Minister Musoke pointed out the continuing inequality of relations between the African and industrialized worlds, and Mr. Spio-Garbrah recalled the developing-country rallying calls of the 1970s for a New World Information and Communication Order and a New World Economic Order. Such language caused neither stir nor derision in a setting in which Africans made no bones about their own weaknesses.

In the same vein, many participants said African governments should facilitate press freedom in their own countries, since one of the crucial sources of information for foreign journalists is the local press — if it is free, credible and professionally sophisticated.

The self-critical approach in no way diminished the zeal with which western media shortcomings were highlighted. Mr. **Helge Ronning**, professor of media and communications at Oslo University, noted the "structural synergy" between disaster and violence on the one hand, and the activities of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the international media on the other. "Disaster journalism" is a big proportion of western media coverage of Africa, and during emergencies, he said, NGO fund-raising campaigns take on a new vibrancy, gaining tremendously from the images of western humanitarian personnel working heroically as symbols of the decency of international aid and of the NGOs themselves. International relief agencies, he added, play an increasingly important policy-making role in crisis-ridden countries, because they went in as the major powers pulled out of Africa in the 1990s.

A Kenyan journalist enlarged the discussion on the media by pointing to the role major powers played in setting the agenda for media coverage.

There was little doubt that Africa ranked lowest in western priorities. The most graphic instance of this was of course the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when nearly a million people were massacred within three months in full view of the world, but not even limited military action was undertaken.

Similarly, well over $100 bn dollars had been mobilized in the last year to tackle the financial crises in South-East Asia and Brazil, while Africa, the world's most deprived continent by far, had obtained only the minimalist of relief and continued to pay nearly $30 bn a year in debt payment, despite repeated G-7 promises of action.

Organization of African Unity spokesman **Ibrahim Dagash** launched a blistering attack on cultural insensitivities and double standards. Quoting extremely derogatory comments about Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and President Yoweri Museveni from the "Mailbag" segment of the BBC's "Focus on Africa" programmes in October, he compared these to the sanitized media commentaries the BBC presents in its "Weekly Review of the British Press."

From the opposite perspective, Mr. **Joe Kadhi**, a former editor of Kenya's *Daily Nation*, said forcefully that however hastily one might criticize the western media, no one can question the fact that the wave of democracy and concern for human rights sweeping across Africa might have faltered without widespread coverage in the western media. ■

AFRICA WATCH

WORLD BANK

Global crisis slows Africa's economic growth

Sub-Saharan Africa's overall economic growth rate in 1998 will likely fall to between 2.1 per cent and 2.4 per cent, down from 3.5 per cent the year before, the World Bank reported in early December. Given the region's rapidly growing population, this means that its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) will turn a negative 0.5 per cent, after several years of positive growth. The Bank estimate is significantly below the 3.7 per cent figure released in early October by the International Monetary Fund, which uses different methods for projecting economic growth.

According to the World Bank's *Global Economic Prospects and the Developing Countries, 1998/99*, a variety of factors were involved in Africa's slowdown, including a resurgence of armed conflict and the effects of the El Niño weather phenomenon. But the dominant factor was the impact of the global economic crisis that began last year in East Asia, which buffeted Africa's vulnerable economies "through all three of the main transmission channels — private capital flows, terms of trade, and export market growth," says the report. However, if the Bank's assumptions about trends in the world economy are borne out, then 1999 should bring a resumption of positive growth, at around 3.2 per cent, rising further to 3.8 per cent in 2000 (see graph).

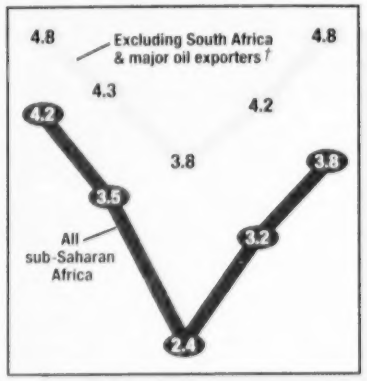
Much of the report is devoted to frankly analyzing the causes of the East Asian crisis and discussing how to better respond to such calamities in the future, including through the adoption of "more flexible macroeconomic policies," a point emphasized in the foreword by Mr. Joseph Stiglitz, the World Bank's Senior Vice-President for Development Economics and Chief Economist. According to the report, the origins of the crisis lay in both "institutional weaknesses in managing domestic financial liberalization and international capital market imperfections." It suggests that the initial international interventions — which emphasized high interest rates and spending cuts in exchange for financial bail-outs — actually may have worsened the downturn.

In future, Mr. Stiglitz says, international financial institutions should consider proposing tighter financial controls by governments and, if needed, "interventions designed to stabilize capital flows." In some cases, he adds, it may be necessary to "reverse the excesses of financial sector deregulation." The severe social consequences of the economic downturn — lost jobs, interrupted education, poorer health and increased poverty — also point to the importance of social safety nets, the report says. Although this discussion focuses specifically on East Asia, the calls for greater flexibility may influence the nature and pace of the policy reforms the World Bank recommends for other regions as well.

Africa, the report's figures indicate, was less severely affected by this economic turbulence than were most other regions, which are better integrated into global markets and thereby felt the impact of the crisis more directly. As a result, sub-Saharan Africa's growth rate in 1998 will still be the second highest of all major regions in the world, only slightly behind the 2.5 per cent expected for Latin America and the Caribbean.

While the slowdown in Africa's growth is a setback, the Bank adds, the "prospects are not as bleak as the broad regional averages might suggest." Within Africa, South Africa and the largest oil exporters were hit hardest. If they are excluded, overall GDP growth for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa would be 3.8 per cent, the report estimates. The countries of francophone West Africa, which use the CFA franc, maintained close to 5 per cent growth in 1998.

Economic growth rates in sub-Saharan Africa (%)



Source: UN Africa Recovery from World Bank, Global Economic Prospects and the Developing Countries, 1998/99

"Despite the challenges of adjusting to a less favourable external environment over the next two years or so," notes the report, "the longer term outlook for Africa offers the promise of significant improvement." ■

FAO

210 million Africans go hungry

Despite further increases in overall food production levels in Africa, the number of hungry people in the region is continuing to rise, says the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Our most recent data on Africa south of the Sahara show an increase in malnourished people from 196 million in 1990-92 to 210 million in 1994-96," said Mr. Jacques Vercueil, an FAO Director, upon the release in late November of the agency's *State of Food and Agriculture 1998* report.

The largest absolute numbers of undernourished people are in Asia, says the report, but sub-Saharan Africa still has the largest proportion of the population that is undernourished. Besides the problem of weather-related crop damage, the poorest countries face foreign exchange constraints that prevent the import of enough food to meet their needs. ■

APPOINTMENTS

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has appointed ***Mr. Zéphirin Diabré*** *(Burkina Faso) as Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with effect from mid-January. Mr. Diabré replaces Mr. Rafeeuddin Ahmed (Pakistan), who is retiring.*

Currently economic advisor to the President of Burkina Faso, Mr. Diabré has served as a member of his country's parliament; Minister of Economy, Finance and Planning; and Minister of Trade, Industry and Mines.

Mr. Annan has also appointed ***Mr. Ivor Richard Fung*** *(Cameroon), left, as Director of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, which is based in Lomé, Togo.*

Prior to this appointment, Mr. Fung, who took up his new functions on 1 December, was Regional Manager for Peacebuilding and Governance with UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa.